

Trouble flares

FROM PAGE 1
villages yesterday morning in the presence of the army. They also burnt down a church and a Buddhist temple, alleged members of the indigenous community.

The army arrived at the place yesterday morning and charged truncheons to bring the situation under control.

However, the situation got worse when an indigenous man attacked and injured an army sergeant, Rezaul, with a sharp weapon, prompting the army to open fire. Rezaul was sent to Chittagong Combined Military Hospital, sources said.

Witnesses claimed that they could identify at least six dead: Laxmi Bijoy Chakma, 30, Liton Chakma, 34, Buddha Pudi Chakma, 30, Debendra Chakma, 43, Notunjoy Chakma, and Banashanti Chakma, 23.

The injured indigenous persons are Shanta Shil Chakma, Amar Bijoy Chakma, Nibesh Chakma, Mrittunjoy Chakma, Jitendra Chakma and Dari Chakma.

Police confirmed two deaths. Rangamati Superintendent of Police Masud ul Hasan confirmed the death of Buddha Pudi Chakma and the officer-in-charge of Baghaichhari Police Station confirmed the death of Laxmi Bijoy Chakma.

But the Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) claimed that eight indigenous persons were killed and 25 were injured.

Meanwhile, Baghaichhari upazila administration yesterday imposed section 144 in Marisya of the upazila as two groups - Pahari Chhatra Parishad, student front of PCJSS, and Parbatya Bangalee Chhatra Parishad, a platform of Bangalee settlers - called protest rallies at the same place centring the incident.

Sources said the violence flared up on Friday night when Bangalee settlers from the neighbouring Russlesquare village set fire to 40 houses of indigenous people at Gangaram Mukh.

Locals alleged that the army backed up the settlers in the arson attack.

But the army claimed that the indigenous people set fire to their own houses with an ulterior motive.

When the army went to Gangaram Mukh yesterday morning to inspect the damage the locals started hurling abuses at them. This soon led to an altercation.

More indigenous people gathered at the spot around 10:00am and the army began charging truncheons to disperse them. At one point, plainclothes Sergeant Rezaul attempted to hit a man, who chopped him with a machete several times and started running away.

This prompted the army men to fire at the indigenous people. At least two persons were killed and one was injured.

Locals claimed that after firing, the army along with the group of settlers set fire to almost all adjacent villages in Gangaram Mukh area. More people were killed during the arson attacks.

Intermittent gunshots rocked the area until 3:00pm.

At least 200 thatched and corrugated tin-shed houses of indigenous people were burnt to ashes in intermittent attacks made allegedly by Bangalee settlers.

The affected villages are Guchchhagram, Gangaram Mukh, Hajachhara, Simanachhara, Retkaba, Jarulchhari, Dippara, Dane Bhaibachhara, Bame Bhaibachhara, MSF Para and Purbapara.

As the settlers continued the arson attacks until yesterday morning, the indigenous community began to resist them. Six indigenous persons were injured during this resistance.

Receiving information, army from adjacent Baghaichhari zone went to the spot at about 10:00am and tried to calm down the feuding groups.

Indigenous people alleged that the Bangalee settlers have been constructing new structures on their land in Gangaram Mukh area, which triggered the dispute over land ownership.

They also said some of the dead bodies could not be recovered as the entire area is now under the control of the settlers and army vigilance.

Baghaichhari upazila Chairman Sudarshan Chakma said about 10 people died in the incidents but the dead bodies could not be recovered from the places of occurrence as Bangalee settlers were present there.

Baghaichhari upazila Nibabi Officer SM Humayun Kabir confirmed the incident but said he heard that two people were killed but he was not sure.

"I saw fire and huge black smoke everywhere in Gangaram Mukh area. I saw houses being set on fire," he told

The Daily Star.

"I along with the army and the OC of Baghaichhari Police Station was going to Gangaram Mukh at about 10:30am to control the situation. But we could not go much further in the face of the riot between the settlers and indigenous people," Humayun said.

"I heard a lot of gunshots but I was not sure who were firing," the UNO added.

Sourendra Nath Chakrabarty, deputy commissioner of Rangamati, said, "I am still not clear about the incident. But I heard about the feud between Bangalee settlers and indigenous people over land dispute and burning down of houses. Our UNO along with the OC went to the spot. So, I will confirm when they report to me after returning from the scene."

Baghaichhari Police Station OC Noyeem Uddin told The Daily Star that the situation was out of control and that additional police forces were deployed.

BACKGROUND OFFFEUD
On January 10, indigenous people of Retkaba village in Baghaichhari submitted a memorandum to the Baghaichhari UNO under the banner of Sazek Bhumii Rakkha Committee. They gave an ultimatum until January 16 to return their land allegedly grabbed by Bangalee settlers, stop resettlement of Bangalees there and remove settlers from the area, sources said.

As there was no fruitful result, the villagers staged agitation and boycotted the Baghaichhari market.

On January 21, army from Baghaichhari zone went to the Shaheed Ladu Monin market and beat up some indigenous people for boycotting the market, injuring eight.

On January 23, Sazek Nari Samaj, a body of indigenous women in Sazek union, put up a dawn-to-dusk road blockade on Dighinala-Baghaichhari and Baghaichhari-Sazek roads, making the same demands.

About 15 indigenous people including Baghaichhari Primary School head teacher Shakya Bodhi Chakma were injured as settlers attacked them.

REACTIONS
Protesting the incidents, the PCJSS yesterday brought out a procession in the town and held a rally on Rangamati-Chittagong road. They demanded immediate judicial enquiry into the incidents and warned of tougher agitation programmes if their demand is not met.

In a press release, the PCJSS said the army could have prevented the attacks by the settlers, but a section in the army and a hardcore communal group under the name of Bangalee Chhatra Parishad made the attacks to grab land and create anarchy in the region.

The United People's Democratic Front in a press release condemned the incidents and declared a dawn-to-dusk blockade of roads and waterways on February 22 in Rangamati and Khagrachhari.

At a press conference at Rangamati Reporters Unity, the Parbatya Bangalee Chhatra Parishad also protested the incident and blamed indigenous people for it. They declared the Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission unwanted in CHT and blamed it for working in favour of the indigenous people.

BCL men

FROM PAGE 16
The arrestee, Mainul in Rab custody told The Daily Star that he with BCL activists, Sagar and Sankar, shot at Faruk on Manikdi Adarsha Biddya Niketan compound in the area.

Sagar had been trying to be the cantonment secretary of BCL while Sankar to occupy a vital post of the unit over the last one year, but Faruk had been in the presidential post for a long time and that caused a rivalry among them, Mainul said.

He also said there had been a feud between Faruk and local drug peddlers who aided Faruk's rivals in the killing.

Sagar and Sankar shot at Faruk after his (Mainul's) shooting to confirm the death, he added.

Flight Lieutenant Khairul Mamun of Rab-4 told The Daily Star that political identity of the killers would be clear after the verification of the information they had received so far and the arrest of other accomplices.

Acting on a tip-off, the Rab personnel followed Sumon and Ali on their way to Savar from Kachukhet area of Kafur, he added.

Zahid joined Sumon and Ali as they got off a bus at Baliapur bus stand in Savar and then the Rab personnel arrested them, he added.

The rest three were arrested with a revolver and 13 bullets at Matikata in Manikdi upon the information extracted from Zahid, Sumon and Ali.



ABDR shop on Manik Mia Avenue in Dhaka.

PHOTO: STAR

BNP leader killed in clash with AL men

A CORRESPONDENT, Meherpur

A BNP leader was killed and 35 others injured yesterday morning during a clash with Awami League activists at Maimary village of Gangni upazila, Meherpur.

The dead, identified as Sentu, 30, son of Akkas Ali of Dhala village, was the organising secretary of BNP unit of Shaharabati union in Gangni upazila.

Police said a group of BNP men with labourers went to Maimary Beel for fishing around 9:00am when local AL activists tried to resist them. Jaffar, another BNP leader had taken out the lease on Maimary Beel during the BNP-led government.

At one stage, a clash between the groups with lethal weapons broke out that left Sentu dead on the spot. During the one-hour long clash, AL men also set fire to the house of BNP activist Nabiul Islam. Fire fighters later extinguished the fire.

On information, Assistant Superintendent of Police Moniruzzaman and Officer-in-Charge of Gangni Police Station Sagir Miah rushed to the spot and brought the situation under control.

Of the injured, four were admitted to Meherpur General Hospital where their condition was stated to be critical while the others were taken to Gangni Upazila Health Complex.

Trader shot

FROM PAGE 16
panicked locals fled when the muggers fired blank shots indiscriminately.

Monsur and his colleague Titu were attacked after collecting money from Rakib Brothers as they attempted to leave on a motorbike.

Monsur was shot as he tried to prevent the men from grabbing his bag.

He was rushed to Dhaka Medical College Hospital with bullet wounds in his cheek, chest and leg.

His is a critical condition. Duty officer at Mohammadpur police station said that efforts are underway to catch the thieves and recover the stolen money.

Salute

FROM PAGE 1
The day is a public holiday. The national flag was hoisted at half-mast atop all government, autonomous and private buildings.

On this day in 1952, Salam, Barkat, Rafique, Jabbar and some other brave hearts laid down their lives for recognition of Bangla as an official language.

The language movement was the forerunner of the nationalist movement that culminated in the Liberation War in 1971 and won the nation independence.

The government of the then Pakistan granted Bangla the status of official language in 1956.

In 2000, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) declared 21 February as International Mother Language Day.

Separate messages were given by the president, prime minister, the speaker, opposition leader and others.

A 39-member team of the India-Bangladesh-Pakistan People's Forum led by Disaster Management Minister of West Bengal Dr. Mortuzza Hossain in Dhaka to pay tribute to the language martyrs.

Around 8,000 police and Rapid Action Battalion personnel and plainclothes officers were deployed at the main venue.

Bangladesh Betar, Bangladesh Television and private TV channels broadcast live the ceremony from the Central Shaheed Minar.

BDR to shut

FROM PAGE 1
the venture, they are getting no profit out of it, he continued.

"Those [private firm] who are running the business now are cashing in on the name and goodwill of BDR."

In the absence of a proper mechanism to measure the profit, every day they [the partner] come and say "there was no profit" and give only an account of the monthly sales, Mainul said.

The border force is in fact trapped in a vicious business cycle, he observed.

There are other hassles too. For instance, he said, if the sugar price increases in BDR shops, buyers call him to seek an explanation for the rise.

Col (ret) Kamal Ahmad, managing director of Nirmal Udyog, told The Daily Star last night that Major Gen Shakil and Udyog's Chairman Abdul Quadir signed the contract in 2007.

Their company has invested Tk 4-5 crore in the shops and has around 300 people employed there, he added.

"The agreement is for 10 years. If the government decides to shut down the shops, what will become of

our investment?" Kamal asked.

According to the agreement, he said, BDR would not have to bear any loss while getting 30 percent of the profit.

In 2008, Nirmal Udyog gave BDR Tk 15 lakh in profit when Shakil was the DG. That was the first and last time it shared any profit with the force.

Tajul Islam Bhuiyan, who heads the firm's audit department, told The Daily Star, "On average, we sell goods worth TK 12-14 lakh every day and make a profit of at least 5 percent excluding all expenditure."

He said they have been planning to expand the business.

Tk 94 lakh

FROM PAGE 16
the capital were informed about the robbery. A two-member probe team formed in Dhaka is going to visit branch soon, Asadullah added.

Meanwhile, Faridpur Additional Superintendent of Police Monira Sultana visited the bank yesterday afternoon.

No cases have been filed so far.

Dhaka, Delhi sign

FROM PAGE 1
plants, we want to utilise that," he said.

The PDB chairman said the two organisations will have 50 percent stake each in the plant and 75-80 percent liquidity for the project will be managed through debt financing.

The NTPC will manage the plant while PDB or any other government officials will participate in its operation.

The PDB chairman said the two sides will ink a detailed agreement in future based on the MoU. They hope to sign it in two months.

On renovation of old power plants, he said PDB would prepare a list of old plants and two of those will be selected for renovation at the beginning.

The government would follow "direct procurement process" for renovating power plants, which would allow the government to negotiate for a favourable price.

"In the bidding system, there is no option for negotiation, which can be done in direct procurement process,"

said the PDB chairman.

He said the renovation cost in the process would be low.

"If we find the cost higher in it, we can cancel the procurement process," he added.

PDB Chief Engineer M Abul Kasem and NTPC General Manager MS Chawla signed the MoU on behalf of the two organisations.

Power Division Secretary Abul Kalam Azad was also present.

Earlier, an Indian delegation, headed by Power Secretary HS Brahma flew to Dhaka on Thursday on a three-day visit for a second round discussion of Bangladesh-India Joint Steering Committee on Power Sector.

During the secretary-level meeting, both sides signed two initial MoUs on Friday on establishing a cross-border power grid, and giving consultancy service to Power Grid Company of Bangladesh.

HS Brahma left Bangladesh yesterday morning while the rest of the delegation will depart today.

Shaheed Minar

FROM PAGE 1
the United Nations website for the International Mother Language Day.

The website was launched in New York on Friday with the specific image on the front page of the UN portal at <http://www.un.org/en/event/s/motherlanguage>.

The International Mother Language Day website is available in all six official languages of the United Nations, said a message received here yesterday.

Yesterday the Unesco also kept the image of the "Shaheed Minar" as the International Mother Language Day symbol on its official website for the first time.

UNB adds: Director-General of Unesco Irina Bokova in a message marking the International Mother Language Day, said the mother language, in which the first words are uttered and individual thought expressed, is the foundation for the history and culture of each individual.

He said languages are the best vehicles of mutual understanding and tolerance.

Cop dies as robbers' van hits police car

A CORRESPONDENT, Jessore

A policeman was killed and four of his colleagues were injured as robbers' pickup truck sideswiped and overturned a police van at Rajhat of Abhaynagar upazila in Jessore early yesterday.

The deceased was identified as Nayek Yunus Ali of Abhaynagar Highway Police Station. The injured are Shahbul, 48, Fazlur Rahman, 40, Ruhul Amin, 47, and Sunil Kumar, 55.

Locals said 15-20 robbers looted four cows from Faruq and Milon's house at Prambagh area in the upazila yesterday morning and tried to escape to Khulna on the pickup truck.

On information police were hot on their trail but the robbers managed to overturn the police van and flee leaving Yunus Ali dead on the spot and four others injured.

The injured were rushed to Khulna Medical College Hospital in critical condition.

Sahara claims 'certain quarter' out to create instability

BSS, Dhaka

Home Minister Sahara Khatun yesterday claimed that the law and order is far better than any time in the past but a certain quarter is hatching conspiracy to destabilise the country.

"A certain quarter is out to create instability when we are beginning the trial process of the war criminals. But none of the conspirators would be able to obstruct the trial process."

The minister was speaking as the chief guest at the inaugural function of a conference of regional and branch managers of Ansar-VDP Development Bank at Krishi Bank Training Institute in the city's Mirpur.

The government is working for ensuring financial stability alongside improving law and order of the country, she said adding that now the stock market is setting records in daily transactions and even the foreign currency reserves are all-time high.

The government is working to turn Bangladesh into a middle-income country by 2021 and a stable environment is necessary to this end.

Additional Director General of Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party Brig Gen ABM Tayeful Islam and Managing Director of the bank M Nurul Huda Chowdhury also spoke on the occasion. Chairman of the bank Rear Admiral (ret) A Taher presided over the function.

In 1996 the Ansar-VDP Bank was set up for the welfare of members of the Ansar-VDP. Now the bank is providing service for 56 lakh Ansar-VDP members.

Giant 'atom smasher' to be switched on again next week

ANI, London

Scientists at the laboratory that operates the Large Hadron Collider (LHC) have said that the giant atom smasher will be switched on again next week.

The particle accelerator was shut down for the Christmas period shortly after setting the record for the highest particle energies ever attained.

According to BBC News, over the coming months, scientists aim to smash that record again as the experiments aim for energies of some seven trillion electron volts (TeV).

Bagerhat SP

FROM PAGE 16

Farmers at Char Gobra in Gopalganj said in the name of demarcating district border, over 100 policemen and 50 labourers on Thursday took away crops from their fields along the Gopalganj-Bagerhat border at Mizanur's directive.

Police also started constructing a road to demarcate the district border cutting and taking earth from the fields. Their unprecedented attempt to grab land was stopped in the afternoon following intervention of locals and Gopalganj district administration.

"The Bagerhat SP wanted to buy my land. When I turned down his offer, he tried to grab the land," said farmer Ranjit Biswas.

Mizanur on Thursday told reporters that he had done it to maintain law and order in the area as there had been disagreements over demarcation of the district border for a long time.

Fonseka getting 'five-star' treatment in custody

Says Rajapakse

AFP, New Delhi

Sri Lanka's president says arrested ex-army chief and defeated presidential candidate Sarath Fonseka is getting "five-star" treatment in custody, it was reported Saturday.

Fonseka, whose detention came two weeks after being beaten in presidential elections in late January by President Mahinda Rajapakse, is being held by the military pending court-martial proceedings on unspecified charges.

Rajapakse reiterated allegations in an interview with India's The Hindu newspaper that Fonseka had been working to divide the army and "engaging himself in activities prosecutable under military law."

The country's defence secretary, Gotabhaya Rajapakse, who is the president's younger brother, has said Fonseka was plotting a coup -- a charge rejected by the ex-army chief.

Fonseka, whose arrest

sparked outrage at home and abroad, is getting "five-star treatment... in a luxury flat," said Rajapakse.

Fonseka won over 40 percent of the popular vote compared to almost 60 percent for Rajapakse in the election that many had expected to be a close fight.

Fonseka was the battlefield architect of the government's victory over Tamil Tiger rebel last May, which ended their 37-year old fight for an independent Tamil homeland that cost an estimated 80,000-100,000 lives.

However, Fonseka fell out with Rajapakse and quit in November and ran against the president in January's elections.

The president has denied any link between the arrest and the presidential polls.

Rajapakse added in the interview that the Sri Lanka's Tamil minority has "no option" but to deal with him in forging a new future with the troubled country.

Thai Diplomat's

FROM PAGE 16

Commissioner yesterday blaming reckless driving by the driver of the killer truck for the accident.

Thai Minister Counsellor Pannee Lickanjale, also the deputy chief of Thai Embassy in Dhaka, was killed in the accident on Dhaka-Tangail highway at Mirzapur upazila in Tangail Thursday last.

As an entourage of Thai Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn, Pannee was returning to Dhaka from Gaibandha. He was running about one hour behind the princess' motorcade.

Later on the day, Tangail Deputy Commissioner M Bazul Karim Chowdhury formed the probe body comprising Tangail Additional District Magistrate Tajul Islam, Additional Superintendent of Police Jamil Hassan and a local official of Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA).

They were also directed to submit the probe report in 24 hours.

Reckless driving of the driver was the main reason behind the accident, the report said. The probe report also mentioned that the speedy truck hit the microbus from opposite direction, while it (truck) was trying to

overtake another microbus.

After conducting a study on the 68-kilometre highway from Mirzapur to Bangabandhu Bridge, the probe members also placed their six-point recommendations to avert road accidents on the busy highway.

The recommendations include immediate arrest of the truck driver, who is now absconding, introducing four lanes in place of existing two-lane system on the highway, ensuring proper traffic control and active roles of the highway police, installing speed measuring devices, construction of speed breakers after every five kilometres of the highway and placing necessary signs and signals.

Thousands of vehicles including passenger buses and cargo trucks from 16 routes of northern districts and five routes of southwestern districts have been plying the highway everyday since the inauguration of the Bangabandhu Multipurpose Bridge in 1998.

Some 1,500 people were killed and 3,000 injured in around 1,200 road accidents on the narrow highway between Mirzapur and Bangabandhu Bridge.

Rice prices remain

FROM PAGE 16
adding that if he were allocated two tons of rice, it would be instantly sold as he operates in a shanty town where people there are eager to buy rice at cheaper prices.

Abdul Kader vends rice in trucks at Jatrabari. He said he sold four tons of rice by 3:00pm and the demand is ever growing.

"People like rickshaw pullers, garment workers and day labourers can only come to the OMS shops after 5:00pm. If I am allocated eight tons of rice a day, I will be able to sell it to them," he said.

Food and Disaster Management Minister Abdur Razzaque said he visited a number of OMS shops and trucks in Old Dhaka yesterday and found the dealers demanding increased allocation of OMS rice.

"We shall increase the allocation to two tons for the deal-

ers and five tons for the vendors," said Razzaque.

People want 10 kg of rice at a time because they do not want to count extra expense for carrying five kg of rice home each time, he added.

Officials concerned said the government planned to appoint 400 dealers and 100 vendors in Dhaka City Corporation areas. But, so far 198 dealers and 80 trucks are operating in the city.

The food minister assured that the number of dealers would soon be increased.

Meanwhile, fair price cards for 25 lakh ultra poor families may defer by a week due to delay in finalising the beneficiary-list.